
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING: REVELATION, VISION 1

Note. Please get a copy on line or at the help desk of the intro to this series to understand the underlying assumptions used in this series.

Vision 1: Chapters 4-7

The throne of God. Ch 4 In the first vision John is taken to an open door into heaven and given an insight into what is happening at the very centre of the universe. At the centre of universe is not nothing but God on the throne. The rainbow circling the throne is a reminder that God is at peace with us (see Genesis 9: 13-17)

The strange creatures around the throne are similar to Ezekiel 1. Their task is to worship God for all eternity. Around them are 24 elders, worshipping. 24 Elders represents 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles, the saints of the old and new covenants. It is a picture of unity of all the people of the earth who have been faithful to God through human history there, worshipping God.

Why does God need to be continually praised and tell us to do so? CS Lewis says we spontaneously praise what we enjoy and value. We also encourage others to do the same. Wasn't that a great game? Isn't that sunset beautiful? "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because our praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed." Worship actually completes us. More so than God. (Guys: This does not mean that heaven is one big church service with lots of singing)

The scroll and the Lamb Ch 5 The scroll is a symbol of purpose of God in human history. The angel says. Who is worthy to begin to unroll the scroll? Who has the key to human history? Answer - Jesus. Jesus, is worthy. The 7 horns represents complete power and the 7 eyes complete knowledge.

V8 Our prayers are part of this process of unlocking history. The gold bowls full of incense are our prayers and are part of unlocking the purposes of God for history.

Everyone is worshipping God who has purchased his people from every tribe, language and nation – the climax of human history. This would have been a huge encouragement to a small band of persecuted Christians.

The first seal: The white horse: Ch 6:1-2 Who is riding the white horse? There has been multiple suggestions. In Rev 19:11 we have another white horse who is clearly Jesus. When symbols are not clear, it is best to use passages that are not symbolic to help us. In Matthew 24:4-7 we see very strong parallels. Jesus is talking about the same things as John - first thing he says is that many come in his name, claiming to be Christ and will deceive many. This suggests the first horseman looks like Jesus but is in fact and imposter.

People get taken in by cults, religions, deceptive spirits. 1 John 2:18

The second seal: The red horse Ch 6:3-4 Red horse War will be one of the characteristics of the age between the first and second coming. 20th Century 100 million killed as a result of war. US spends 1.45 trillion a year on it's military war machine. 40% of total world spending

In the OT it is clear that God fought for the Israelites, often miraculously, and regardless of how strong they or enemy were. If they trusted in God they would win. But Zec. 9 9-10, says Jesus comes to destroy war and be a peacemaker.

Three centuries after Jesus death, Christians undermined the Roman Empire's war machine by a commitment to non violence. Only in the fourth century, when Roman Emperor Constantine made a commitment of faith did the idea of a "just" war come about. Throughout history there have been Christians who have refused to fight. There is ongoing debate if Christians should fight but Jesus came as a peace maker.

The third seal: The black horse: Ch 6:5-6 Scales represent justice and with the connection to food represents famine. This horse represent inequality. One loaf, (literally a measure but translated loaf.) Wheat loaves were more expensive than barley. In John's day 16 loaves of bread could be bought for a days pay. This is talking about scarcity of food. There is food around but at a price. "And don't damage the olive oil and wine." Possibly refers to more expensive items. There will be food, but it will be scarce but some will have luxury.

One of the biggest issues facing the world today gap between the rich and ten poor. World's top 26 billionaires own the same as 50% of the worlds poorest. In NZ 50% of the country own just 2% of all assets and 10% of the country own 25%

Are Christians meant to sit back and say famine, inequality are signs of the end time so we will just wait for him to come. No, we are called to help the poor and fight against suffering, live out Kingdom values.

The fourth seal: The Pale green horse: Ch 6:v 7-8 Death. Sword, famine, disease, wild animals. From pandemics alone many die. We are very aware Covid, But there have been many worse pandemics throughout history. I.e. Bubonic Plague 25 million Black death 75-200 million Spanish Flu 20-50 million. Famine. Last century 75 million died of food shortage. But famine and extreme food shortages are still happening, normally in places affected by climate change and war. 4 is a symbol of the 4 directions of the earth. So death from these things will impact all corners of the world. But only ¼ are killed.



Again symbolic of the fact that not everyone will be directly impacted by these things.

These four horses parallel the 4 evil kingdoms of Daniel 7:2 and the 4 sets of horses in Zechariah 6:5. These horses are still under the sovereignty of Christ, that he is using to both bring judgement to unbelievers and refinement to his people. Challenge to get our heads around when faced with suffering.

What did the early Christians do in the face of these 4 horsemen? Did they sit back and say end is near? No, they fought against them. Even war, by refusing to fight. They set up hospitals, cared for dying,

The fifth seal: The suffering church Ch 6:9-11 John opens the fifth seal and under the altar John sees the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and their testimony. As the horsemen ride across the world, there is suffering for followers of Jesus. See also Matthew 24:10. They cry for God to vindicate himself and told to wait a little longer as more martyrs are to be added to their number. Last century 45 million lost lives following Jesus.

The idea of it being costly following Jesus is not popular in West. Last century rapture theology developed: that God will take people out of the world before great time of suffering begins – the Tribulation. This is a recent teaching in the church with Biblical evidence very slight. It is a hard theology to sell to Christian in Stalin's concentration camp.

Jesus said. One thing that determine his return. Mat 24:14. When the kingdom message has been preaching to the whole world - every people. Again, we are not to sit back. But are to get involved in spreading the Christian message.

The Sixth Seal: The end vs. 12-17 John then watches as Jesus opens the sixth seal and we see Cosmic upheaval. Again this language is very similar to what we see in Matthew 24:10:31-32, Isaiah 13:10 but is not literal. Stars can't fall to earth. It might refer to some kind of global upheaval, but the key is Jesus coming is not a secret event. Every passage that refers to Jesus return tells of a very noisy event. Angels shouting, trumpets, Whole world is going to see the Jesus is Lord

An interlude : The 144,000 Ch 7: 1-8 Ch 7 runs chronologically parallel to the other six seals. Before the four winds blow over the earth. (four horsemen) something has to happen. "Don't damage anything until we have marked the servants of God with a seal." What is the seal? Told that when we come to Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Eph 1:13

Who are the 144,000? Passage has generated all kinds of theories

Some say Jews only. Literally 144, 000 Jews from some future time.

JW's 144, 000 them. Tricky. More than that but he rest stay on earth!

144,000 is symbolic. In Jewish thought 12 x 12 is the perfect square. Multiply it by 1000, it is the number of completeness and vastness. Vast yet complete number of people who are called servants of God.

Who are these Jews? What does the New Testament say Rom 2:28-29, Gal 3:29. Phil 3:3 1 Peter 2:9 Paul and Peter take OT language and apply it to the church.

John hears the numbers but then he sees who they were. From every tribe and people and nation. God has sealed them and said that despite the deception, war, famine and death, (the tribulation) they can trust him because they belong to him. This does not mean they will not suffer but that they can take hope - they are sealed.

Heaven Ch 7:9-17 Ends with this scene from heaven. The suffering from 4 horsemen, 4 winds is over and celebration begun. This last passage many see as the highlight of the book and why we should be the most positive and optimistic people on earth. Here is Esk 37:26-28, Isaiah 49:9-10, 25:8 fulfilled. No matter how tough things get here or how much we suffer, this is our hope .

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How does this message challenge your views of Revelation and it's relevance?
2. How can we live in the present reality and yet have a vision for the future?
3. Why is God seen as being continually praised? Is God egotistical?
4. Read 7:15-17 What impression of heaven to you get from these verses?
5. How do you react to the idea that we are called to fight against the four horsemen? Is it too hard? What can we do to oppose
Deception
War? Do you think a Christian can fight in war?
Inequality? What do you think about us being in the top 10% of world's richest? What responsibility does that place on us?
Disease?
6. How do these chapters change your view of life and the world around you?
7. Why might we prefer to think about the tribulation as happening only before Christ's return rather than now? What might be tribulation for Christians in NZ currently?



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